

AKIS and advisory services in Malta

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Agriculture has a marginal role in the overall Maltese economy, but it is an essential feature of local landscape and environment, although the more intensive productions (i.e.: pig breeding and horticulture) still struggle with the sustainability of their practices. The productive basis is essentially made by small farms whose holders' population is progressively ageing. Moreover, there's a general lack of sound agricultural training, often replaced by a "learning by doing" approach that is not conducive to a prompt acknowledgment of the innovations.

Nevertheless, over the last years, European rural and agricultural policies have widely contributed in reshaping the local agriculture, thanks to the entry of young farmers and new farmer-based organisations that are more oriented towards entrepreneurship, full-time working and innovation.

On the other hand, local AKIS is still not completely structured in order to comply with the needs of local agriculture, being them focused on the enhancement of competitiveness and sustainability of small old-fashioned farmers or on innovative approaches to agricultural practices and markets pursued by younger ones.

AKIS in Malta is in fact characterised by a little number of actors with a low level of coordination and a lack of systemic vision. Farm advisory services are provided by few private, mostly farmers'-based organizations and one governmental body (AgriConnect), which present different degree of integration and approaches within the local AKIS and a clear distribution of competencies on advisory topics.

Besides major public actors, that however are the main providers for CAP and RD matters, also farmer's cooperatives and the producer's organizations act as advisors, with a field of competences more shifted toward products marketization and technical assistance and mean of production. However, farmers mostly rely on external experts for specialized advisory services. As a matter of fact, the main FAS provider is a public subject directly belonging to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Animal Welfare (MAFA), and research and innovation in the field of agriculture is tightly in the hands of the main superior education actors (University of Malta & the Malta College of Arts and Technology), which, however, belong to the Ministry of Education.

The policy frameworks on the matter are equally lacking complementarity, as they are articulated in three main areas (**Research and Innovation; Education and lifelong learning; Agriculture and environment**) scarcely integrated the one to



each other. Recent efforts are being put into place in order to favour policies integration, by adopting, through public consultations, a more participatory approach that is shaping the regulatory framework.

AKIS diagram

